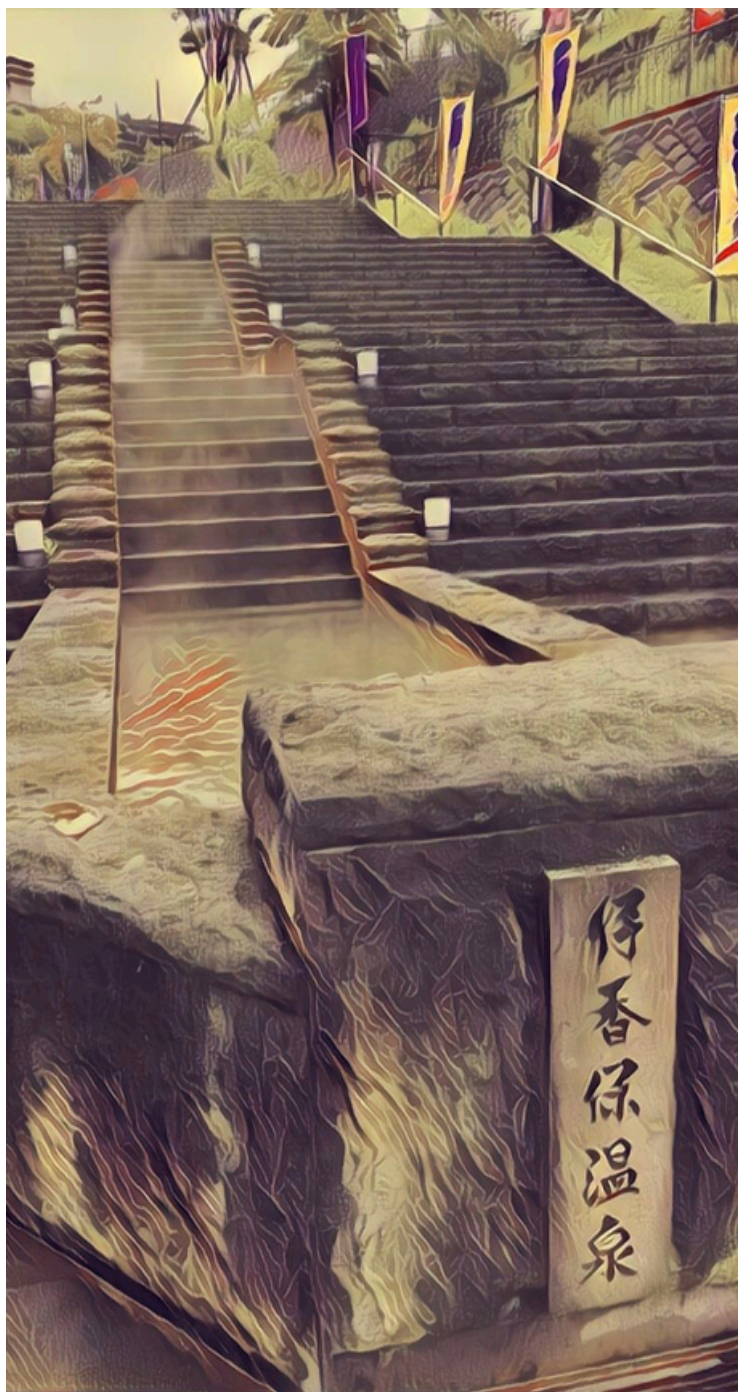


Speakeasy

December 2018, Volume 30



Insights into
Culture and
Language Learning
across Three
Contexts

Integrating
Intercultural
Communication into
the Language
Classroom

The Permanent
Guest

The Transition from
ALT to University
Teacher

Eikaiwa and
Stigma in Japanese
ELT

My Language
Learning History
for
Reading in
a Second Language

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A New Direction?



By Richard J. Sampson

Late in 2017, Ray Hoogenboom approached me about the possibility of taking over the editing of *Speakeasy*. To my surprise, I acquiesced (although I have a habit of doing so for Ray!). Upon hearing the glad tidings, John Larson, the previous editor, eagerly gave me a (somewhat terrifying) run down of the run up to publication. And then a couple of months passed. When I got back to thinking about *Speakeasy* again in June, I decided to send out a call for articles with a more narrative focus on our experiences as language teachers and learners in Japan. Over the next few weeks, I started to hear from members and friends of JALT Gunma who had received the call enthusiastically. And by late August, we had a full complement of papers. Apparently, others also feel the worth of sharing experiences, and we have “stories” from a diverse range of educational contexts in *Speakeasy* 30.

Christopher Baumunk commences proceedings. His article is an intriguing exposition of developing understandings about the relationships between culture and language learning through experiences in three different countries. Continuing this theme, Tomoko Yoshida and her associates contribute an introduction to integrating intercultural communication to the language classroom. Packed with useful ideas and go-to references, I anticipate the paper will be invaluable for readers who have wanted to incorporate culture more in their teaching,

but just did not know where to begin.

Following, Phillip Bennet interrogates his experiences over his time in Japan. In a thought-provoking manner, his narrative focuses on identity changes and conflicts as a “permanent guest” and ALT in this society. Steve Ferrier next provides an outline of his perceptions as he transitioned from an ALT role to that of a part-time university instructor. He describes how his fundamental teaching values were formed over his time as an ALT, and their fluctuations in response to the different challenges and affordances of working in higher education. The focus on teaching experiences is rounded out by Daniel Hooper. He draws on examples from popular culture and research that exemplify the negative labeling of *eikaiwa*, before problematizing this stigmatization.

The final two contributions take up learner perspectives. Akiko Fujii shares part of her reflections on her language learning history. Her article is interesting in that, while we often hear stories of becoming a more proficient L2 user, these rarely focus on *reading* experiences. Antonija Cavcic, brings *Speakeasy* to a close with a review of a book urging L2 learners to study abroad to “start over”.

And so, to conclude this introduction, I would just like to thank everyone who does what they can to make JALT Gunma what it is. I hope you enjoy this new direction for *Speakeasy* 30.

With the Currents of the Wabash, Napo and Tone Rivers: Insights into the Relationship between Culture and Language Learning Across U.S., Amazonian and Japanese FL Classrooms

 By Christopher M. Baumunk

Introduction

As humble instructors will admit, it's inevitable that, at some point in our careers, we foreign language teachers will find ourselves caught up in prioritizing the grammar and syntax portions of language teaching over cultural learning and understanding. That is to say, culture is often considered secondary and even ignored as lessons are prepared. It's easy to forget that we are bringing two very distinct cultures together when we introduce a language to non-native speakers. It has been my experience, from teaching Spanish in the Midwest of the United States to EFL in Japan, with a stop-off in the Amazon rainforest in between, that cultural instruction and understanding are of upmost importance for both language teacher and pupil. Furthermore, I have found that the cultural concepts students bring to their studies have a considerable influence on their ability/desire to acquire an L2. Therefore, through this paper I seek not to prove or disprove any major linguistic theory, but rather share some insights I have gained through working in these three very distinct cultural settings. In doing so, I anticipate that these insights may encourage readers to reevaluate what implications culture holds for the language classroom.

Eye-opening snakes

Earlier this year, I came to work to find a book on my desk. The first thing I noted was its title, which was quite provocative, *Don't Sleep, There are Snakes*, by Daniel Everett. The post-it affixed to the book, from a JTE co-worker, said that he thought I would find this book interesting. He knows me well. Indeed, the title caught my attention, but the subtext, "Life and Language in the Amazonian Jungle," and the sight of a gringo man swimming in an Amazon tributary, on the cover, had me immediately turning the pages.

Daniel Everett, now Dean of Arts and Sciences at Bentley University in Waltham, Massachusetts, was a Christian missionary and aspiring linguist when he decided to move to

a remote village in the Brazilian Amazon, to live among the indigenous Pirahã people. His original intent was to learn the tribe's language so that he might successfully convert the people to his religion. During his time in the Amazon, he made surprising observations about the way the Pirahã culture guides and dominates how they use their language. Furthermore, rather than successfully converting the Pirahãs, it was he who would experience profound change in his belief system.

Certainly all of this appealed to me, as I too had felt the “call of the wild” Amazon, when I was a younger, raging idealist. I know I had great schemes and visions in my mind for how I would go off to a small Ecuadorian Amazon community and teach. And, just as was Everett's experience, I found the Amazon and its people had a lot more to teach me than I them.

It surprised me, though it shouldn't have, that the culture my students in the Amazon brought to the table should so strongly shape their willingness and ability to learn the language I wanted to teach them. After all, I had already had experiences with a very similar revelation, trying to convince university freshmen, in Indiana, of the need to learn Spanish. During my tenure as an ALT in Japan, I've noted even more how Nippon culture shapes language-learning (and often language frustrations). I have *Don't Sleep, There are Snakes* to thank as the catalyst to me finally getting these observations down.

Spanish: “The easy language”

The concept of cultural intelligence is relatively new. Fortunately, I have personal access to insights from a study of cultural intelligence that was conducted at my alma mater by my wife, Daniela Báez. She published her doctoral thesis, *Cultural Intelligence in Foreign Language Classes*, about the impacts of language learning on our understanding of other cultures. As she pointed out, “The concept of cultural intelligence was only created and introduced to the educational areas of social sciences and management in 2003” (Báez, 2012, pp. 15–16). Fortunately, despite the newness of the notion, we have ways to measure the cultural intelligence of individuals. There are four mechanisms that are considered for measurement, which include cognitive, metacognitive, motivational, and behavioral skills and abilities. These four parts are interdependent, but I'm most interested in the motivational portion (Earley & Ang, 2003). I believe that student motivation is heavily influenced by their culture, which, in turn, heavily regulates their willingness and ability to learn language.

We evaluate the motivational aspect of cultural intelligence to better understand an individual's “...desire to learn more about cultural differences and how to interact around people from different countries” (Báez, 2012, p. 19). This first became apparent to me when teaching elementary Spanish courses, as a graduate student at Indiana State University. As part of this course, which was a requisite in the university's foundational studies program, students were asked to keep a language learning journal, to document how they felt about their studies and progress. Among my students' reports for the motivating factors of their choice, I noticed a common thread. Namely, many students reported having selected Spanish because the university was requiring they choose a language and they heard

Spanish was “the easy language.” I’m afraid many of them were considerably disappointed after experiencing the time and effort one must put in to develop an understanding of even the fundamentals of Spanish verb conjugation.

Evidently, many of the students I had in my Spanish courses weren’t exactly thrilled about the idea of learning another language to begin with. A near majority of them were in my courses because they had opted out of language studies in their high schools. I recall many students expressing sentiments of an “I don’t need to learn another language, everyone else speaks English” nature. More times than not, these students struggled the most. I believe their opposition was a precondition, formed in their culture. As an Indiana native, I am willing to make a judgement call and say that rural Indiana isn’t always open to the idea of multiculturalism. In some ways, we could argue that the “English-only” culture, which is clearly present in the environment where I taught Spanish, produces students who are recalcitrant to learning other languages and cultures. This could also be linked to the racial threat hypothesis. It’s difficult to deny that a culture of fear creates language learning barriers. I came across an article about the damage English-only policies in the Philippines have brought about, which I think is applicable here. Isabel Martin (2014) explains, “... students will not learn a language if they fear it...[not] recognizing the multilingual context of teaching and learning...only reinforces fear of the language” (p. 79).

Finally, I don’t want to give the impression that all of my students carried a culture of opposition with them to Spanish-learning. I also had the pleasure of working with some very highly-motivated students in those Spanish classes. Perhaps the most motivated were the “heritage learners.” These students were typically Latinx, with Spanish-speaking grandparents, great-grandparents or further removed family members. I found that the background knowledge and/or cultural connections these students possessed produced the expected end product; that is, they had more successful learning outcomes.

Look around, we are in the jungle!

I spent a year working alongside 4 other American teachers in the Amazon. We learned to live, adapt, and work in the jungle. We found that ambiguity, a relaxed sense of time, and environmental awareness of our little community held big implications for how our students would approach learning.

“Chris-*tindi*, why are you so stressed all of the time? You need to relax, this is the jungle!” This is an example of how a typical conversation between me and the school chef at the Amazon boarding school I lived at for a year would start. Though his name was Efrain, everyone called him Mono (Monkey), and I could never find out why. This ambiguity was not unusual, and it shaped how many things were said, done, and learned in Mondaña community, in the Ecuadorian Amazon. I learned to embrace this kind of vagueness of meaning and enjoy its main purpose, to jest and relax. Mono was the community’s biggest jokester. He loved to call everyone [Name]-tindi, and everyone would have a good laugh when he did. The laughter was stronger still when you would ask anyone what it meant. To this day, I have to rely on the less than credible explanation, from Mono himself, that tindi

means strong in Kichwa.

I feel that, in many ways, the air of ambiguity in our learning environment had a lot to do with our surroundings. There was certainly a lack of urgency or stress amongst the students. After all, WE WERE IN THE JUNGLE. Over time, I found that this lack of urgency meant our students were either uninterested or unable to contemplate their long-term language goals. People in the Amazon seem to be more solidly anchored to the present, “Which bird is that singing just feet away from where Chris-tindi is trying to teach?” I could relate to what Daniel Everett (2009) describes as an immediacy of experience principle, which he observed as a cultural constraint among the Pirahãs to limit their exchanges to the present moment (p. 132). Our students were uninterested in reading a book written 50 years ago; they found little value in that. They wanted to learn the things that would work for them right away, things they could readily apply to their lives and their interests.

“My name is Dalia. I’m from the Coca City. I study eco-tourism at the high school. Welcome to my community. Thank you.” As I listened to another student sadly drone on, with her memorized speech, prepared to introduce herself to the tourists who would come to their community, I realized this kind of learning wasn’t useful for her. The students wanted to be able to share their knowledge and culture of the Amazon with the visitors, they wanted to tell them about what was going on in the jungle and the importance of the Pachamama, the earth/time mother. They also needed to know how to talk to tourists and hotel guests, as well as do things like teach them how to take a better picture of that cute little green tree frog they came across. This type of language has a specific purpose, and we visiting teachers learned to utilize it in instruction; their culture didn’t allow for learning the trivialities of languages, which we often tend toward in EFL and other fields.

Being aware of your surroundings is perhaps nowhere as important as it is in the Amazon jungle. A traditional EFL classroom didn’t work in this cultural setting. As Stephanie Reinert (2018), one of the experienced educators I had the privilege to work with and learn from, puts it:

I recognized a lot of learning disconnects in regards to their background knowledge. The students definitely didn’t have the same motivational urgency (not necessarily a negative), as the value to achieve which we instill in the U.S. They were more laid-back and not as goal-centered as American students. My students were paying attention to everything except the lesson. They knew what was going on around them ‘outside’ and not in the class. I found it a huge difference of what they thought was important and what wasn’t. They were more attuned with the lessons that the Pachamama taught them in comparison to ‘books.’ (Personal communication, July 2, 2018)

Similarly, my fellow teachers and I needed to learn to be aware of our surroundings as well. The time we spent in that little Amazon community taught us how to embrace the cultural dissimilarities between our students and us, in order to become better educators and learners. I didn’t know it then, but I would carry those understandings across the Pacific, to employ countless times in Japan.

“Fine, thank you. And you?”

I owe a lot to my students and the educational and cultural experiences we share. The things I picked up in the U.S. and Ecuador helped me quickly recognize that culture shapes the way Japanese students approach English as a Foreign Language. I think Everett's (2009) observation that Pirahã “culture was subtle but powerful in its conservative values and in the way that it shaped their language” (p. 70) can easily be said about Japan as well. Needless to say, this understanding has gotten me through countless class period quandaries here in Japan. I will expand on my three favorites: a tendency towards formulaic response, long periods of silence (or no response), and something I like to refer to as “the bowling method.”

If you have a work and/or social life in Japan, it's inevitable that you will find yourself uttering a set of standard phrases daily, the *aisatsu*. Japanese society values routine language formulas. Yuri Kumagai (1994) expands on this in her paper about how Japanese culture affects language-learning. She claims that, “For the Japanese, these expressions are dictated by social rules, rather than by individual choice” (Kumagai, 1994, p. 29). I would agree. This is why I've been asked, countless times, “How do you say *otsukaresama deshita* in English?” It's why my one-on-one conversations with students are often painfully limited: Q: “How are you?” A: “I'm sleepy.” Or, as a colleague of mine recently discovered with her English class, there are dozens of ways to say *gambare* in English. It also explains every ALT's favorite inside joke, “Hello everyone, how are you,” and the collective response, “I'm fine, thank you. And you?” Our students anticipate these types of formulaic exchanges in English as well, and often struggle to cope with the ever-expanding nature of Western-English expressions. Are you staying woke?

Is a prescribed response favorable to no response? I quickly learned to appreciate the sounds of silence in my EFL lessons in Japan. Japanese proverb highlights it more appropriately, “To say nothing is a flower.” As Kumagai (1994) points out, from Buddhism to high-context society and etiquette, the concept of silence is a deep-rooted and honored social asset (pp. 19–21). As many others who teach in Japan will have noted, the appropriate wait and silent time is far different from that expected in Western classrooms. I have personally observed wait times of more than one minute, after which, more often than not, a perfectly appropriate response is given. Often, I find the length of the given response is much longer than I had expected or anticipated. This brings me to the subject of my next observation, “the bowling method.”

In Japanese conversation, it is neither uncommon nor unacceptable for a response to a question or an explanation of a concept to be rather lengthy, with very limited (often one word) utterances of acknowledgement from the receiver. I think there is a culture of respect for the speaker and a recognition that he or she is expected to say their piece to the fullest. I liken this to bowling. The speaker throws the bowling ball down the lane (expounds on a point lengthily) and we wait to see how many pins are knocked over (the overall idea of what was said). This often contrasts with the “tennis style” westerners expect in conversation.

This can frequently be seen in English class, where what the teacher thought was a question requiring a very short response produces an extensive or complex answer, with a great deal of thought put into it.

Conclusion

How do we reconcile all of these differences to bring culture and communication together? For me, bringing my experiences from the U.S., Ecuador and Japan together to form my own personal “Trinity of Cultural Intelligence” has proven extremely useful in my professional development. Everett (2009) states, “Language is the product of synergism between values of a society, communication theory, biology, physiology, physics..., and human thought” (p. 211). The linguist Henry Gleason (1961) simplified his observation in saying that, “...language is both creation and emblem of culture.” My own experiences have led me to favor the confluence of linguistics and anthropology, which allows for the convergence and interdependence of language, thought, and culture in explanation of how we give meaning to our world and communicate. Language expert Vyvyan Evans (2015) calls this “the golden triangle.”

In a less theoretical sense, my “culture matters” approach to language instruction has helped me grow as a professional and an individual. If you take cultural influences in language learning into account, you can craft altogether better lessons and form much stronger relationships with your students and co-workers, in an international setting. In Japan, this has led me to explore new teaching strategies such as student-centered learning, Ask Answer Add (AAA) conversation, Japanese Lesson Study (*jugyo kenkyu*), and even taking a serious look at how Japanese students learn mathematics.

All of this has steered me in the direction of developing a deeper respect and understanding for language variations (the American Spanish, the Ecuadorian English, the Nippon English) and cross-cultural instruction. If you strive to prioritize culture in your instructional strategies, I doubt you will be disappointed in the results. We hear a lot of talk about our increasingly globalized world, but, if our students and educators are to be ready to encounter and succeed in it, we must all become more culturally intelligent.

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Integrating Intercultural Communication into the Language Classroom

 By Tomoko Yoshida, Bipin Indurkha, John Larson, Jon Dujmovich, Barry Keith

I moved to Japan when I was 18. Having been born and raised outside of Japan to Japanese parents, I was able to speak and understand conversational Japanese but wasn't familiar with its use outside my home. I didn't know that I had to use a different set of words when speaking to those who were older than me, that asking questions could be perceived as belligerence, and that maintaining group harmony was more important than being "correct." Being fluent in the language but completely oblivious to the cultural context made me what Milton Bennett (1997) calls a "fluent fool." In fact, as my Japanese improved, it seemed like I got into more trouble because my cultural faux pas were no longer seen for what they were; I was often viewed as being intentionally rude or ill-mannered.

Tomoko tells this story to her students to explain why, as their language improves, it is imperative for them to understand the cultural context in which they use the language. While being "polite" might be valued across most cultures, what constitutes politeness varies from one culture to another. This article introduces a theoretical framework for organizing a course on intercultural communication training. Based upon this foundation, it then presents a set of critical incidents that can be used in the course. We close by providing short suggestions on different ways to use critical incidents.

Theoretical framework for teaching culture

Normally, when we enroll in a class to learn something (e.g., how to swim, how to cook) we are already (painfully) aware of why we need to learn this particular skill. For example, when Tomoko first started working for the Sheraton Hotel, she was given a computer running Windows, which she had never used before. To get any work done, she needed to learn how to use it. She signed up for a computer class where the instructor gave some basic information about using the computer (i.e., knowledge) and provided the opportunity to practice using the computer (i.e., skills). Most skills-based classes thus have two components: knowledge and skills.

What makes intercultural communication training unique is that most people are not aware of why they need to learn about culture and cultural differences. They think, "If I can speak the language and I am polite, why do I need to learn about culture?" They are often not aware that what is considered "polite" or "normal" in one culture might not be so in another. When teaching culture, we also need to be aware that cultural differences can trigger strong emotional reactions. When what we value is violated, few people calmly think, "That's an interesting cultural difference." Instead, we often feel angry or offended. For this

reason, when designing a course on intercultural communication training, Brislin and Yoshida (1994) suggest including the following four components: Awareness, Knowledge, Emotions, and Skills.

Awareness

In a one-year class, it is a good idea to spend at least a few weeks on helping students become more aware of how culture shapes the way they see the world — how it governs their values and behaviors. We should also help them understand how cultural differences can cause unintentional misunderstandings. Many authors have compiled various experiential activities for raising awareness about culture. Readers who are incorporating some cultural content into the language classroom might want to consult Fantini (1997). For those who are teaching a content-based course on intercultural communication or organizing a workshop where the focus is more on culture than language, Kohls and Knight (2004), Seelye (1996), Pedersen (2000, 2004) are useful resources. Those looking for a book of activities written in Japanese might want to examine Yashiro, Araki, Higuchi, Yamamoto and Komisarof (2001) as well as Yashiro, Machi, Koike and Yoshida (2009).

Knowledge

Cultural knowledge can be divided into two types: culture-specific and culture-general (See Bhawuk, 2017 for more details). Culture-specific knowledge refers to dos and don'ts such as taking off one's shoes when visiting a Japanese home. Unless one is organizing a class for participants going to a particular culture, teaching culture-specific knowledge can be tedious and inefficient. However, to give students an idea of the range over which cultures vary, having students do presentations on gestures across the world (Axtell, 1991) or business manners from various countries (Morrison, & Conaway, 2006) can be a fun and effective activity.

In a university course on intercultural communication, teaching culture-general theories can help students organize and analyze cultural differences. While numerous theories exist, some of the classic ones include Hofstede's cultural dimensions (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010), Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars' (2011) seven dimensions of culture, E.T. Hall's (1976) concept of high vs. low context communication, and Hayashi's (1994) theory on M-Style vs. O-Style organizations and analog vs. digital communication.

Emotions

Culture tells us what is good or bad, beautiful or ugly, polite or impolite. Entering a new culture where what we value is no longer the norm can therefore trigger strong emotional reactions, which can lead to culture shock (coined by Oberg, 1960). Any course on intercultural communication must prepare students for this emotional roller coaster. Knowing that one will have a strong gut-level reaction, however, is not enough. For this reason, effective intercultural communication training often uses activities such as games and simulations to help participants experience firsthand what it feels like to have their values violated.

One of the original cross-cultural simulations is called Bafa' Bafa' (Shirts, 1977). In this simulation, participants first get indoctrinated into the norms of either alpha or beta culture. Next, they send observers and participants to the other culture to learn about them. This is a powerful simulation that allows participants to experience what it is like to enter a new culture (awareness) and experience culture shock (emotions), while developing techniques for learning about a new culture (knowledge and skills).

In Tomoko's university class, she uses Rafa' Rafa', which is the children's version of Bafa' Bafa'. With non-native English speakers, the simpler rules make it easier to focus on the task. Ideally, 2-hours should be allotted for the simulation but it can be done in a 90-minute class. As with all simulations, however, much of the learning occurs after the simulation during the debriefing. If there is not enough time for a proper debriefing in class, students can do the debriefing on their own in the form of an essay.

A simulation that is effective in allowing participants to experience culture shock in less than 30 minutes is called the Outside Expert Awareness Exercise (Pedersen, 2000, 2004). There are numerous other simulations that have withstood the test of time, such as BARNGA (Thiagarajan, 2006), which is a card game that allows participants to experience various cultures with different rules. A more recent one is entitled Rocket, which is based on the experiences of individuals working at the International Space Station (Originally developed by Hirshorn, 2010; See Kirchhoff & Yabuta, 2017 for how they adapted it for the Japanese classroom).

An important note about simulations is that because they can trigger strong emotional reactions, facilitators need to be experienced. When running a new simulation, it is recommended that facilitators first experience it as a participant and then assist a veteran trainer before conducting it in class. Readers who are interested in experiencing and learning simulations are encouraged to come to the Society of Intercultural Education Training and Research (SIETAR) Japan's monthly meetings, retreats, and conferences (<http://www.sietar-japan.org/en/>).

Skills

A common mistake that is made in many intercultural communication workshops or classes is that too much time is spent on awareness, knowledge, and emotions with little time left for skills. Even when there is time, because intercultural communication skills cannot be easily defined, they are harder to teach.

One skill that can be taught easily is the ability to analyze a well-intentioned misunderstanding by separating what actually happened (description) from the different cultural interpretations and evaluations. This technique is called D.I.E. and it is one of the most popular exercises in the intercultural field (See Nam & Condon, 2010 for more details). Another approach is to help participants cultivate their own intercultural skills through simulations and role-plays. For example, during the simulation Ecotonos (Nipporica, 1997), the facilitator creates three different cultures and participants collaborate in various business situations. As the trainer or instructor can create new cultures each time, it is possible to repeat the simulation multiple times to allow skill development. While the simulation can be

completed in 2-hours, a one-day workshop allows participants to experience the simulation multiple times so they can try out different strategies. Other experiential methods that help participants develop their own skills include the Contrast Culture Method (Stewart, 1966; adapted by Fujimoto, 2004) and the other is the Triad Training Model (Pedersen, 1977; adapted by Yoshida, Gimbayashi, Suzuki & Tamura, 2016).

Critical incidents in intercultural communication training

One way of raising learners' awareness of certain aspects of culture is through the use of critical incidents. In the sense that we will consider them here, critical incidents are stories in which well-intentioned misunderstandings occur due to cultural differences (Flanagan, 1954). These misunderstandings occur because individuals from different cultures sometimes perceive and interpret the same situation differently. While well-intentioned misunderstandings occur between people from the same culture, it is more common between those from disparate cultures.

The intercultural sensitizer (ICS) or culture assimilator is a collection of critical incidents that end with a number of alternative explanations for why the misunderstanding occurred (See Cushner & Landis, 1996 for a more detailed discussion). ICSs can be culture-specific or culture-general. The purpose of the culture-general ICS is to help participants understand culture-general themes. (Brislin, Cushner, Cherrie & Long (1986) and Cushner & Brislin (1996) are examples of culture-general ICSs.) To this end, instructors can break the students up into small groups and give each group a set of critical incidents that share the same theme. Students are asked to identify the theme.

The ICS has been researched extensively with strong evidence suggesting its effectiveness in improving intercultural sensitivity (Cushner & Landis, 1996). However, despite this strong empirical grounding, there still exists a shortage of culture-general critical incidents written for Japanese students. In response, the authors drew on their pasts to choose events that actually happened to them, in order to create a set of critical incidents that might be salient for this particular audience. Through reading and guessing why the non-Japanese characters were puzzled by these incidents, students should be able to see the extent to which culture influences values and behaviors. Pseudonyms are used for anonymity.

Critical incidents for Japanese students

A ride to the airport

Naomi was visiting her friend, Keiko, in Hawaii. On Naomi's last day, Keiko's friend, Ricky, drove her to the airport. At the airport, Naomi got off and stood by the sidewalk and waved. Ricky waved back but Naomi continued to stand there and wave. Ricky waved back again but Naomi was still there waving. Finally, Ricky looked puzzled and asked Keiko why Naomi was still standing there. Why was Ricky puzzled?

1. Ricky was not used to people being polite to him.
2. Ricky was not used to people thanking him for a ride.

3. Ricky expected Naomi to just thank him and walk away.
4. Ricky was hoping Naomi would give him a hug.

A drive down the coast

One Sunday, Sam invited four friends to go on a drive down the coast of Oregon. Dan, Rina, Akemi, and Cindy were ready to jump in when Rina started giggling and pointing at the front passenger seat saying, "Dan, I think you should sit there." Dan looked at Rina and said, "Why, because I'm fat?" Rina giggled. There was an awkward silence and the three girls sat in the back seat of the car. As they got closer to the coast, Sam stopped at a gas station. The five got out and bought different snacks. As Dan was eating beef jerky, Rina approached him, giggled, and said, "It smells." By the time they go to the coast, Dan was not happy. Why was Dan unhappy?

1. As Americans tend to be sensitive about appearances, suggesting that someone is overweight is rude.
2. As Americans tend to be sensitive about the way they smell, suggesting that someone smells is rude.
3. Giggling can be considered rude in America.
4. Dan thought Rina disliked her.

One night in Tokyo

Professor Saito was hosting Professor Jones and his wife, who were visiting from the US. One evening, professor Saito took them to a members-only club for a *kaiseki* dinner. They dined in a private room where waitresses were dressed elegantly in kimonos and the walls were decorated in traditional artwork. Each dish was delicious and served in exquisite plates and bowls.

Professor Jones's wife, who had read some books about Japanese culture and manners, admired and complimented each dish. At the end of the dinner, she was surprised when the proprietress of the club presented her with one of the dishes on which one course was served. She just said, "Since you were admiring these dishes, we present you with one." Professor Jones's wife was taken aback. She was visibly embarrassed but accepted the dish hesitatingly. Professor Saito seemed to be anticipating this gift because he came prepared and offered a return gift to the proprietress of the club, who accepted it after some hesitation.

When she returned to her hotel, she asked the concierge to wrap it so she could pack it in her suitcase. The concierge admired it, saying it looks very expensive. Professor Jones's wife was embarrassed and told him that she hoped it was not too expensive. Why do you think Professor Jones's wife was hoping the gift was not too expensive?

1. Because she was afraid it might break on the flight back home.
2. Because she was worried that she committed a cultural faux pas by praising the dishes too much.
3. Because she was worried that Professor Saito and his wife might have spent too much money on them.

4. Because she preferred to use cheap dishes.

Thank you for waiting

Karen was visiting Japan with her husband. She noticed that every time she used the elevator in the hotel, the elevator operator would say, "Thank you for waiting," even if they had not been waiting at all. One day, she went to the beauty salon. After a long and relaxing shampoo, the stylist said "*Otsukaresama-deshita!*" When she found out what this meant, Karen wondered why the stylist would thank her for her hard work when all she did was sit there and have her hair washed. She thought to herself, "Shouldn't I be the one thanking her for her hard work?" Why was Karen confused?

1. Karen was not used to people being polite.
2. Karen was not used to being thanked for her efforts.
3. Karen was not used to these particular greetings.
4. Karen was used to the slow service in the U.S.A. so she did not expect to be thanked for her patience.

Toilet paper etiquette

Kayoko studied Spanish in Tokyo. The first time she went out of Japan was to a Spanish-speaking South American country for work. She stayed at a hostel for women. On her first night there, she went to use the toilet and noticed that the toilet paper roll was hung the wrong way. (The loose end hanging from below the roll instead of above the roll.) She was disturbed and thought that someone made a mistake. She turned it around. But when she looked at all the other stalls in that hostel toilet, she found that they were all hanging the wrong way. Why do you think this happened?

1. Kayoko was staying at a cheap hostel so the service was terrible.
2. South Americans are laid back and don't care which way the toilet paper is hanging.
3. They did this to annoy Kayoko.
4. This is the way toilet paper is usually hung in this country.

The difficult landlord

Jack had been living in his apartment in Japan for a few months. His Internet was slow, and he wanted to get a faster connection. He called the Internet company and asked them to install a fiber-optic line in his apartment. The Internet company told him he needed to get permission from his landlord. So, Jack called his landlord and asked him if he could install a fiber-optic line in his apartment. His landlord replied that it would be difficult to do so. Jack said he would do whatever it takes to get faster Internet. His landlord replied again that it would be difficult. Jack said he didn't care how difficult it was; he would do anything. Again, his landlord replied that it was difficult. Jack asked if it was a matter of money, but it was no use. His landlord continued to say that it would be difficult, and Jack never got a faster Internet connection. Why didn't Jack get faster Internet?

1. Jack's Japanese was not good enough.

2. The landlord was being vague.
3. The landlord was lazy or afraid of doing anything difficult.
4. The landlord was hiding something.

The doctor's diagnosis

It was Lito's first winter in Japan, and he got a sore throat. Lito always got a sore throat in winter at home, and at home the doctor always diagnosed him with strep throat, gave him antibiotics, and he was better in a few days. So Lito did some research, translated "strep throat" and "antibiotics" and went to the doctor's. When he met the doctor, the doctor asked him what was wrong. Lito told the doctor that he had strep throat, that he always got it this time of year, and that a few days of antibiotics would make him better. Lito was trying to save the doctor some time and felt he was being very helpful. However, the doctor didn't seem pleased. He examined Lito silently, looking in his nose and throat. After a quick examination, he told Lito that it was only a cold and he should go home, drink plenty of tea, and rest. Lito explained again that the doctor was wrong, that this was the same sickness he always had, and that he needed antibiotics. The doctor got angry and left the exam room. Lito left the clinic without paying. Why didn't Lito and the doctor get along?

1. The doctor made a mistaken diagnosis.
2. Lito doesn't have strep throat.
3. Lito treated the doctor with disrespect.
4. The doctor doesn't like foreigners.

The on-time arrival

Ian worked as an ALT at a Japanese school. He was invited to go along on a school bus trip. The teachers told him that since the buses were leaving at six, everyone should arrive at school by 5:45. Ian set his alarm, woke up on time, and arrived at the school at exactly 5:45. He was surprised to find that all the students and teachers were on the buses. The vice principal met him and told him what bus to get on. When he got on the bus, no one said anything to him and he could tell the other teachers were not happy. The bus started moving shortly after he sat down. Why were the teachers unhappy with Ian?

1. The teachers were talking about Ian before he arrived.
2. Ian was late.
3. Ian mistook the arrival time.
4. The teachers told Ian the wrong time.

The pet-trimming student

Sean was teaching an English class of Japanese students. He told them to talk about their dream jobs. The class was going well, and Sean was walking around the class listening to the students' conversations. He overheard a girl telling her partner about becoming a trimmer. He didn't understand what she meant and asked what a trimmer was. She explained that a trimmer was someone who cut the hair of people's pets. Sean was surprised and thought the student had misunderstood the assignment. He told her that this conversation

should be about her *dream* job: the job she would choose if she could be anything. He gave examples like a doctor or an astronaut. The girl promptly burst into tears and ran out of the classroom. Why was she upset?

1. Pet-trimming is a prestigious job in Japan.
2. The student didn't understand the activity.
3. The student has an unusual dream.
4. Sean thought the student should have a more important job.

Irrashaimase

After graduating from university, Stephen moved to Japan to join his girlfriend. Shortly after his arrival, he noticed that every time he entered a restaurant or a store or a hotel, the staff would say *irasshaimase!* Stephen would smile back and say *irasshaimase* back to them and bow. After noticing the shop clerks giggle or look shocked, he stopped doing this but even after many years in Japan, when he hears *irasshaimase* he still wants to say something back to the shop-keepers. Why do you think Stephen has this reaction?

1. Stephen likes to make people laugh so he is trying to be funny.
2. Stephen is used to storekeepers and customers giving reciprocal greetings.
3. Stephen still does not understand what *irasshaimase* means.
4. Stephen was annoyed by the loud greeting and wanted to show his frustration.

You look tired

Brad really enjoys going to Tokyo on weekends to study with his friends. Saturday classes are long and hard, but they are also interesting and he was looking forward to the class on Sunday. He got a cup of coffee and was feeling happy and energetic as he walked into the classroom. Some classmates looked a little sleepy and others had their noses in their textbooks. Makoto was sitting alone in the corner and Brad went over to him. "Hey, Makoto, how's it going?" Makoto looked up. "Hi. You look tired!" he said. Brad felt embarrassed and didn't know what to say. Why was Brad embarrassed?

1. Makoto was worried about the narrator.
2. Makoto probably didn't do his homework for Sunday's class.
3. Brad thought that Makoto was rude.
4. Brad was tired from studying on Saturday.

(Explanations of these critical incident tasks can be found online at <https://speakeasyjournal.wordpress.com/2018/11/12/integrating-intercultural-communication-into-the-language-classroom-appendix-explanations-of-the-critical-incidents/>)

How to use critical incidents in class

Critical incidents can be used in many ways. An instructor can use them as an entry point to introduce a concept, theory or theme to be discussed in class. For example, how the notion of "politeness" varies across cultures (e.g., A Ride to the Airport; A Drive Down the Coast),

how business customs are different from country to country (e.g., Thank you for waiting; *Irasshaimase*; One Night in Tokyo), how communication styles can cause misunderstandings (e.g., The Difficult Landlord; The Doctor's Diagnosis), how "common sense" is not the same in all countries (e.g., Toilet Paper Etiquette) or how there are various concepts of time across the world (e.g., The On-Time Arrival). An entire class can also be organized around the critical incidents. For instance, each group of students can be in charge of acting out one critical incident asking the rest of the class to guess why the confusion occurred. This can then be followed-up with students writing their own critical incidents based on their experiences. Critical incidents can also be used to teach the Describe Interpret Evaluate (D.I.E.) method (see Nam & Condon, 2010 for more details). Critical incidents are a versatile tool that can address each of the components that Brislin and Yoshida (1994) contend are essential in a beneficial course on intercultural studies: awareness, knowledge, emotions, and skills.

Conclusion

As culture and language are inextricably linked, the instruction of the two should similarly be taught together. We hope that this article has provided readers with an entry point for incorporating intercultural communication material into their language classes.

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The Permanent Guest

 By Phillip Alixe Bennett

The stranger is...[unlike the wanderer who is here today and gone tomorrow] the person who comes today and stays tomorrow. He is, so to speak, the potential wanderer: although he has not moved on, he has not quite overcome the freedom of coming and going... [H]is position in this group is determined, essentially, by the fact that he has not belonged to it from the beginning, that he imports qualities into it, which do not and cannot stem from the group itself. (Simmel, 1908/1950, p. 1)

Stranger identity

What Simmel describes in *The Stranger* details my – and possibly many others’ – experience living as an immigrant in Japan, existing in perpetual flux between being a part of the local community while existing outside of it, that is, as a permanent guest. For many years, being a stranger was the defining factor of my personal identity. The concept of personal identity can be envisioned in a number of ways (e.g., Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004; Slay & Smith, 2011; Pennington & Richards, 2016), however, in the context of this paper I would like to confine it to “an answer to the recurrent question: ‘Who am I at this moment?’” (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004, p.108).

Starting from the time I arrived in Japan I comfortably identified as a stranger. The reason why I was comfortable with the stranger identity was because I am a black-Latinx-first-generation American. My identity resulted in me being treated as, and thus feeling like, a stranger even within my home country (see Slay & Smith, 2011). I did, and still do, take issue with this. However, I didn’t take issue with it when I arrived in Japan because it was in fact the very reason why I was here: to import qualities which cannot stem from the group itself. What better way to summarize the official job description of a JET Programme assistant language teacher (ALT), that is, “to promote internationalisation in Japan’s local communities by helping to improve foreign language education and developing international exchange at the community level” (JET Programme, n.d.). However, the longer I stayed and became involved in the community, the stranger identity shifted from being my main identity to one of a growing number of identities. Initially, this was a positive change for myself and those around me, yet, it would later result in conflict.

Assistant language teacher identity

As mentioned earlier, I came to Japan as an ALT through the JET Programme. The main job duties of an ALT are currently listed as, “team-teaching, or assisting with classes taught by JTEs/JTLs [Japanese teachers of English/Japanese language teachers]... [and] assisting in the preparation of teaching materials” (JET Programme, n.d.). However, the most prominent job description is “to interact with local communities to promote internationalisation at the

local level” (JET Programme, n.d.). Therefore, my personal identity, the stranger, was also the foundation of my professional identity, i.e., the intersection of beliefs, values, and experiences an individual attributes to their person in their occupational context (Ibara, 1999; Slay & Smith, 2011). From a sociological perspective, my job as an ALT was also my social role, which is defined as “the behaviour expected of an individual who occupies a given social position or status. [It’s] a comprehensive pattern of behaviour that is socially recognized, providing a means of identifying and placing an individual in a society” (Encyclopædia Britannica, 1998).

Day et. al (2006) state that “[there are] unavoidable interrelationships between professional and personal identities” (p. 603). The interrelationship of my personal identity, professional identity, and social role resulted in me being seen as and feeling like a stranger rather than an assistant teacher. This positioning resulted in no conflicts during my 5 years as a JET Programme ALT because I identified primarily as a stranger and secondarily as an ALT – this was also reinforced through the ways in which I was treated in the workplace and the community, that is, as a permanent guest. That being said, the experience provided me with an abundance of professional development such as receiving basic training via attending seminars and workshops, self-study of second language teaching, gaining valuable pedagogical insight from JTEs and other teaching staff, and learning how to communicate and function in the Japanese language and work environment. These acquired skills were influential, if not paramount, in my later direct employment as an ALT by a private high school.

Before beginning my master’s degree, the aim of the lessons I made was to create an environment where students felt comfortable using English, communicating opinions and interests, but not to teach English language overtly. In my first few years at the private high school, I was what Fujimoto–Anderson (2005) describes as a language specialist, a native speaker (a stranger). The JTE was the subject specialist, the language teacher. However, the role I fulfilled within the school broadened each year. These new demands required me to become more and more of a subject specialist and closer to a teacher rather than just a language specialist; in other words, the duties of an ALT were becoming just one facet of many other duties I fulfilled. The transformation of my role moved me to make a change towards what Smith (2003) calls, “teacher–learner autonomy” which is “a capacity for self-directed teacher–learning” (p.5).

Identity stress

It became apparent that I need further education in order to meet the growing demands of my job, so I pursued a Master’s degree in TESOL. Becoming a graduate student, I began to develop a disciplinary identity. In short, a disciplinary identity is an identity formed through the process of attaining a formal (language–teaching) education – i.e., “knowledge of such areas as: language learning theory, testing and assessment, curriculum and classroom management, applied research methods, and critical pedagogy” (Pennington & Richards, 2016, p. 14).

This development began to impact my lessons, mainly by my implementing the disciplinary knowledge I was learning. In addition, the teaching staff expressed an interest in what I was learning and welcomed the transformation I was experiencing. These changes also resulted in me struggling with my stranger identity being tied to my teacher identity because I started to identify professionally as a teacher. I experienced something along the lines of an internal conflict or identity-stress, which is when “a person feels unsure about her/his identity and questions who she/he is” (Pennington & Richards, 2016, p. 7). Within the community and in the workplace my stranger identity was now one of many identities and, professionally speaking, not that relevant. In regard to the JTEs, they wanted me to be both a stranger and a teacher but found much more value in the changes occurring due to my TESOL studies. Additionally, from my standpoint, I perceived that the students also felt and valued the change to a more autonomy-supportive learning environment, fewer teacher-fronted lessons, and an improved pedagogical praxis. I was hopeful that I would be able to secure a permanent position at the high school due to almost a decade of professional performance, my growing knowledge of TESOL, and the rapport that I had developed with my coworkers over the years. It seemed as if the stranger identity was becoming of less and less value to the position, yet, the administration felt otherwise. After signing the annual contract for my 8th year I was informed that I would not be offered a contract for a 9th year. I was never given a clear answer as to why, but it was expressed that the decision was bureaucratic and not based on my performance. Indeed, through consultation I learned that the JTEs and other teaching staff were surprised and unhappy with the decision. Nevertheless, the position is currently filled by a JET Programme ALT, that is, a stranger. What I found the most interesting about this experience was that I was contacted months later by the school to help the newly-arrived ALT to acclimate to the position. This request, in my opinion, was evidence that my professional identity was viewed by the school administration as more of a teacher than as a stranger. Further, I understood that the school placed much more value on the former than the latter.

Applicant-identity-stress

Over my years living in Japan there are more identities – parent, spouse, family member, friend, mentor, student, teacher, and so on – which have superseded the stranger identity. Yet, it's the stranger identity that still is, to some, the defining factor of my professional identity which can be problematic (e.g., Slay & Smith, 2011). As I begin my last semester of graduate school while working as an ALT, in a new but similar environment, it's apparent that the ALT position itself has a kind of identity-stress. Perhaps better put, the position has applicant-identity-stress, as it asks for strangers, but its demands are best met by trained language teachers (Fujimoto-Anderson, 2005; Johannes, 2012). In fact, based on the yearly contract system, it employs ALTs as wanderers, someone who is here today and gone tomorrow. As I now look for EFL teaching positions in Japan outside of ALT work, it is not uncommon to see positions seeking a native English speaker, a stranger, with a substantial amount of expertise, such as publications, years of teaching experience, and so on. Yet,

these positions oftentimes still involve a limited contract period with no chance of permanent employment – here today and gone tomorrow. It seems apparent that this applicant-identity-stress is systemic in language education extending beyond the ALT position.

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Assessing and Reinforcing Values: The Transition from ALT to University Teacher

 By Steve Ferrier

In April 2018 after 13 years of being an assistant language teacher (ALT), I made the transition to working at university as a part-time English lecturer. In this paper I will review the experiences and the challenges I have faced in my new position. I will also discuss the core teaching values and beliefs which informed my decisions in the classroom, along with the differences and similarities I perceived between the roles of ALT and university teacher.

Assistant language teacher 2005-2018

I arrived in Japan as a member of JET (the Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme) in August 2005 after completing a Masters in Screen and Media studies. Like many JETs I wanted to live near Tokyo. To my surprise at the time, however, I was contracted to the Miyazaki Board of Education in Kyushu. I worked in a small city at a technical high school for two years. I found the experience difficult at times as it was my first full-time job and my first overseas experience combined with being in a small town. Nevertheless, I learned as much as I could about Japanese culture and the practices of English teaching. In 2007, I decided to extend my experience in Japan and move closer to Tokyo. I gained another ALT position from a dispatch company and was sent to Takasaki, Gunma to work at a municipal high school. In a rare opportunity for an ALT, I was given my own oral communication class for first graders where I could decide the syllabus and grade the students. I focused on pair- and group-work such as conversation tests, how-to-do presentations, debating, and PowerPoint presentations on famous figures in history. In the five years I spent in this position I developed my core beliefs and values as an English teacher:

- A teacher should know their subject and be well-prepared and passionate.
- A teacher should encourage learner autonomy and where possible create student-centered activities in which students can make their own decisions and receive feedback from not only the teacher but also their classmates.
- A teacher should be flexible and adapt classes to their students' needs and abilities.
- A teacher should be constantly self-evaluating their work and be continually evolving their style and methods.
- Above all, a teacher should create a relaxed classroom environment where students feel comfortable in practicing English with their classmates. In other words, the teacher should develop a rapport with their students and be a motivator as well as a source of knowledge.

The Takasaki Board of Education (BOE) dispensed with dispatch companies in 2012. I was hence re-contracted, directly hired by the BOE. However, I was then transferred to a junior high school and for the next six years I worked at five different junior high and elementary schools in Takasaki. The Takasaki BOE was undergoing a period of transition at that time. Many experienced ALTs had to move schools to accommodate the increasing numbers of new ALTs and the introduction of the Takasaki Plan, a syllabus designed for use in almost every elementary school under the auspices of the Takasaki BOE (Ferrier, 2017). Whilst I enjoyed my time working at different schools and learning how to adapt to different classroom environments, I was beginning to feel restless and dissatisfied with my current situation. I had been an ALT for thirteen years and felt that I had experienced and learnt as much as the position had to offer, and that for my own career and personal development I needed a change and a new challenge.

Part-time university teacher 2018-present

In August 2017 I began having discussions with friends and other teachers about possible openings at universities in Gunma and Saitama. Over the next seven months, three teachers put me in contact with five universities and I was able to gain part-time positions at three of them, with eleven classes across the week. The three universities will henceforth be referred to as A, B, and C.

I was immediately challenged upon becoming a university teacher. As an ALT, I had a three-day orientation in Tokyo for the JET Programme, followed by numerous seminars over the years where I learnt from and shared ideas with my peers. In contrast to this, there was an hour-long meeting for English teachers at University A, a general orientation at University B, and no orientation at University C except the interview where I was given a textbook and shown my classroom. Naturally, this made me feel apprehensive but there was no solution other than to learn the different systems and procedures of the three universities and to ask many questions to my more experienced colleagues. Above all, I had to rely on the experiences I had gained as an ALT and my core beliefs as a teacher.

In four of my five classes at University A I was given a textbook and syllabus to follow. I taught two grammar classes, one listening class, and a reading class. The students in these classes were majoring in International Communication and there were eighteen students in each class, the classes being separated by ability. As the students were very motivated I wanted to give them as much opportunity as possible to practice the English they were learning with their classmates. Thus, I kept my explanation time to a minimum and allowed the students to practice or perform the language in pairs or groups. In the remaining class, a third-year selective entitled English in Drama, I had free license over what I wanted to teach. I selected five films to show the students. They then discussed them in pairs or groups and made PowerPoint group presentations on the films, together with individual presentations on their own favorite films. The students made their own decisions regarding the content and format of their presentations. Considering that it was my first planned syllabus at university level, I thought it went very well and the students gave me good

feedback. Above all, at University A I was able to encourage student autonomy and allow students to practice English in a positive environment.

At university B, I had four classes on one day of the week, a total of 6 hours teaching time. I taught three Unified English classes and one Spoken English class. The first-year students in three of the four classes were majoring in Information Technology and Childhood Education, with the remaining first-year class consisting of English majors. I decided to use the same syllabi as the former teachers did the previous year. I realized all too late that it was a mistake to do this as the Unified English classes used three different syllabi with three different textbooks, all of them at a level much too high for my students, who all had a TOEIC score below 300. Moreover, the textbooks focused heavily on TOEIC testing, which I had no experience in teaching. As the level was too high, I also felt that the students were quickly losing motivation. I had a dilemma as to whether to continue with the syllabi, or to change the textbook and create my own syllabus which I could use across all three classes. As I was teaching a Unified English course, I wanted students to focus more on the essential skills for communicating in English. I also wanted to create a more positive environment where students were using English with their classmates, one of my core teaching values. After much deliberation and consultation with other teachers, I changed to a beginner level four-skills textbook a month into the semester. I had to make handouts for all the students across the three classes as the window to buy textbooks had passed and it would have been unfair to ask the students to buy another textbook. The effect of changing the syllabus was immediate. The students became re-motivated as they understood the content and they had many opportunities to practice speaking English with their classmates. As with University A, I focused a great deal on pair-work. I also had students make name cards which I would collect at the end of every class and distribute randomly at the beginning of the next class. Thus, students had a new partner for every week. This helped to create a good classroom environment where students became used to working with different partners. The decision to change the textbook was vindicated, but it was an experience I do not wish to repeat. It reinforced my belief that a teacher should be well-prepared and design a syllabus that is best suited to the needs and abilities of their students.

Finally, at University C I had two classes. The title of my class was Developmental English III, a course for second-year students majoring in Engineering. I was given a four-skills textbook for both classes. Similar to University B, the students had a low ability in English. The students were also very shy and had a low intrinsic motivation for learning English, a direct contrast to the students of University A. This was the biggest challenge to my core beliefs as a teacher. It was a struggle at times to develop a rapport with the students and to motivate them. My classes became more teacher-centered and I focused more on whole-class activities, such as having students listen to audio and practice pronunciation by repeating after me. However, I also used pair-work as much as possible, even though it was difficult to get students to practice with their classmates in English for any sustained amount of time. As with University B, I used my name card system to help students become used to working with different classmates. In addition, class one had 39 students but class two only had 13 students, so it was a lot easier to get class two students

to communicate with each other and to monitor what all the students were doing at any given time.

At the end of the semester, I gave tests to all eleven classes at the three universities. During the semester, I had been grading students by their attendance and participation, having devised my own system that could be used in all classes. I was given sole responsibility for the content and difficulty of the tests and how they would be marked, together with how much weight I would assign to the tests for the overall grade. It was a great challenge and learning experience for me to make my own tests and set them at a suitable level for all the classes. In the end, I was able to achieve this and spent the two weeks after the semester ended marking the tests and submitting the final grades for each student.

Overall, I was satisfied with my first semester as a university teacher. I had taught at three different universities and encountered varied class sizes and students with a wide range of English ability. I had to adjust my teaching methods for each class and even change the syllabus at one university. However, I learnt from each problem and used my core teaching beliefs and values to inform my decisions. I resolved to continue evaluating and improving my teaching style and methods.

Differences and similarities between ALT and university teaching roles

Predictably, one of the main differences between being an ALT and teaching at university is the amount of responsibility and autonomy allocated to each role. Most ALTs at junior high school level visit one class per week and assist the Japanese teacher of English (JTE). The ALT practices pronunciation of words and sentences from the textbook with the students and occasionally plans activities for grammar points the JTE has been teaching. Very rarely does a junior high school ALT have responsibilities beyond this in the classroom, with the exception of extra-curricular coaching for regional speech contests. The role of a high school ALT is largely similar, the rare exception being when an ALT is given their own class to teach with the assistance of a JTE. With hindsight, I was very fortunate to have had this responsibility in Takasaki as it gave me experience in syllabus planning and grading which the majority of ALTs cannot gain.

On the other hand, ALTs at elementary school are often given the primary role in team-teaching, with the homeroom teachers (many of whom have no training in English teaching) taking the role of monitoring student behavior and assisting the ALT where possible. In some cases, homeroom teachers who have confidence in using and teaching English take the principal role or share the teaching of the class with the ALT. Most ALTs lead the activities in the classroom and make classroom materials to engage the students. It could be argued that elementary ALTs have more responsibility than their junior high or high school counterparts. However, almost all ALTs have little to no responsibility for classroom management, syllabus planning, or assessment.

The complete opposite applies for university English teachers. In all my university classes, I had to make my own decisions, such as which parts of the textbook I would focus

the most on, how to teach difficult grammar points or reading passages, and how to evaluate the students. Such a sudden increase in responsibility from being an ALT brought its own pressures, but I grew in confidence and developed as a teacher because I was given much more autonomy than I had ever experienced as an ALT.

Another difference between being an ALT and a university teacher is the class sizes. The class size for elementary to high school level in Japan ranges from 20–40 students. In contrast, at university level class sizes may be as small as 10 students, or as large as 60. This calls for flexibility. A small class allows for some freedom in terms of lesson planning and flow and also allows the teacher to give detailed feedback to each student. A large class requires a great deal of classroom management, particularly for students who are not motivated and who may in turn affect the motivation of other students by their behavior. Small class sizes also allow for student-centered activities whilst large class sizes may lean towards being more teacher-centered, with more organization and planning required. In some cases, a teacher may have to establish routines and lesson structuring that a large class will instantly recognize (Harmer, 2015). Despite this, I used pair-work in all my classes, as I believe that pair-work enables students to use and practice the language with their peers, thus allowing them to share responsibility whilst also promoting learner independence (Harmer, 2015). In larger classes I had to be careful to monitor all pairs since some students tended to veer away from the task. Having students sit with a different partner every week at Universities B and C helped to avoid those issues.

I also realized that there are similarities between being an ALT and a university teacher in Japan, particularly in the areas of student motivation and classroom environments. Results from recent studies suggest that students begin disliking English in junior-high school because it becomes difficult for them. They may not understand the grammar or listening and they may get low test scores which reinforces their lack of confidence. Once students begin disliking English, they may continue to feel the same way at university level (see Matsuno, 2018). Thus, both ALTs and university teachers have to deal with different levels of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in their students. The role of the ALT is especially important in this case, as they provide an opportunity for students to converse in English outside the confines of learning grammar and taking tests. In other words, they give students a chance to see English as a living language and as a tool to communicate with the wider world. A native speaker of English working at university can also perform a similar role, whilst also encouraging students who may have lost motivation for studying English before entering university.

Both ALTs and university teachers of English should strive to create a relaxed, positive classroom environment in which students can feel comfortable learning and practicing a second language. This is necessary for any successful class no matter the age and/or ability of the students. The ALT at times performs songs and dances with the children and the university teacher often has students give presentations or short speeches which provide opportunities for positive feedback. In both cases, the students gain confidence in English and their motivation to continue using English will increase. ALTs, however, may have difficulty influencing the classroom atmosphere if they are restricted to a secondary role in

the classroom. A university teacher, however, has sole responsibility for their classroom environment.

Therefore, despite the differences in the two roles, it is important for all second-language teachers to create an environment where students can not only raise their abilities, but also gain confidence in their abilities, which will hopefully lead to them being more motivated to acquire the second language (Ball & Edelman, 2018). Teachers who can do this will have a successful career no matter which level of students they are teaching.

Conclusion

My first semester teaching at University was an enjoyable and challenging experience. I relished the feeling of autonomy in the classroom but at the same time I felt the weight of responsibility in my new role. The experience forced me to assess and reinforce the core teaching beliefs and values that I had developed as an ALT. Above all, by the end of the semester I had come to the conclusion that all effective teachers of a second language share the unique quality of creating successful classroom environments where students feel at ease to learn and practice with their classmates. It is this quality that I want to continually improve upon in the years ahead.

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Too Close for Comfort: Eikaiwa and Stigma in Japanese ELT

 By Daniel Hooper

Private English conversation (*eikaiwa*) schools cover the entirety of Japan employing thousands of teachers and representing a multibillion-yen industry (METI, 2017). These schools lie outside of formal educational institutions and are often viewed as an entry-level position for new teachers (Kubota, 2011; Nagatomo, 2016). In this article, I wish to examine *eikaiwa*'s stigmatized position in our field and explore some of the pejorative images that are attached to this sector. I think at this point it is important to clarify what I do not intend to say. Firstly, I have no intention of claiming that the *eikaiwa* industry is not deeply troubling in many ways – *eikaiwa* schools are often exploitative and the way that many schools handle issues of race, native-speakerism, and gender is a major concern (Appleby, 2013; Kubota, 2011). Secondly, this should not by any means be interpreted as an attack on secondary or tertiary education. I currently feel satisfied and well-supported in my position as a university lecturer and believe that I am providing a worthwhile educational experience to my students. I merely hope that through this article I can foster a more nuanced take on *eikaiwa* teaching and relate my own discoveries on some problematic issues running through our entire field.

At this stage, I feel that it is necessary to clarify my claim that *eikaiwa* is stigmatized in Japan. Rather than relying purely on anecdote and relating derogatory comments I have heard (and made) about *eikaiwa*, it is important that we also look to popular culture and formal research in order to get a more well-rounded take on this topic.

As I mentioned previously, *eikaiwa* is seen as an entry-level job with few qualifications required and, as such, is regarded as the “bottom rung” of a hierarchically structured field (Nagatomo, 2016). Furthermore, while Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) in secondary education are largely comparable in terms of qualifications and teaching experience, some argue that *eikaiwa* is “seen as crasser because it is private enterprise” (Makino, 2015, p.3). Also, in popular culture a number of negative stereotypes ascribed to *eikaiwa* teachers exist that ensure they remain deprofessionalized and on the periphery. One enduring image known by many in the expatriate community is the “Charisma Man” (Rodney & Garscadden, 2002). Originally from a satirical comic strip, this image of the unprofessional, unqualified Caucasian male *eikaiwa* teacher, largely playing games in class and more concerned about sexual escapades with Japanese women than teaching, is arguably central to the prevailing view of *eikaiwa* (Appleby, 2013; Bailey, 2007).

In reality the sexualization of Caucasian male teachers is often promoted by the *eikaiwa* schools themselves (Bailey, 2007; Kubota, 2011), and this can have a demotivational effect on teachers as they feel they have been deprofessionalized and reduced to “language

hosts” or “entertainers” (Appleby, 2013; Hooper & Snyder, 2017).

Another prevalent negative stereotype leveled at eikaiwa teachers is that their role is more akin to a fast food restaurant worker than an educator. This comparison is also alluded to in the “Charisma Man” comic in Figure 1 as the male applicant with his unskilled fast food experience beats out the professionally trained female educators for the eikaiwa position. Eikaiwa is therefore positioned as a setting where teachers are not only unskilled but, in fact, low-skilled workers (defined purely by race, nationality, or gender) are actually viewed as preferable to trained or experienced teachers.



Figure 1. Charisma Man applying for eikaiwa work (Rodney & Garscadden, 2002) (Retrieved from http://www.charismaman.com/CMweb_4.98.jpg)

In McNeill's (2004) Japan Times article, he raises the idea of eikaiwa being an example of George Ritzer's (2000) concept of “McDonaldization” because he claims that many schools produce a low quality product within a highly-controlled system manned by unskilled easily replaceable labor. In this view of eikaiwa, teachers are reduced to the role of pedagogical “burger flippers” teaching lessons that are “about as nutritious as a bag of salty fries” (McNeill, 2004). This pejorative eikaiwa/fast food analogy has caught on with books such as *English to Go* (Currie-Robson, 2015) (see Figure 2) railing against “McEnglish” and online message boards referring to teachers as “Eikaiwa Mcmonkeys (sic)” (Reddit).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, eikaiwa has received scant attention in academia (Nagatomo, 2013, 2016) with most of the studies that do exist on the context focusing on eikaiwa schools as “socio-cultural curiosities rather than educational institutions” (Makino, 2016, p. 4). From my own research on former eikaiwa teachers who had transitioned into university teaching, some participants revealed their own awareness of a professional stigma in the field attached to eikaiwa. One teacher admitted that he saw eikaiwa as a “black cloud”

over his resumé whereas another teacher stated that: “I think that kind of, um, stereotype or something about eikaiwa, um, in some ways makes it difficult to say, to put your hand up with vigour, “Yes, I did the eikaiwa thing” (Hooper, 2017).

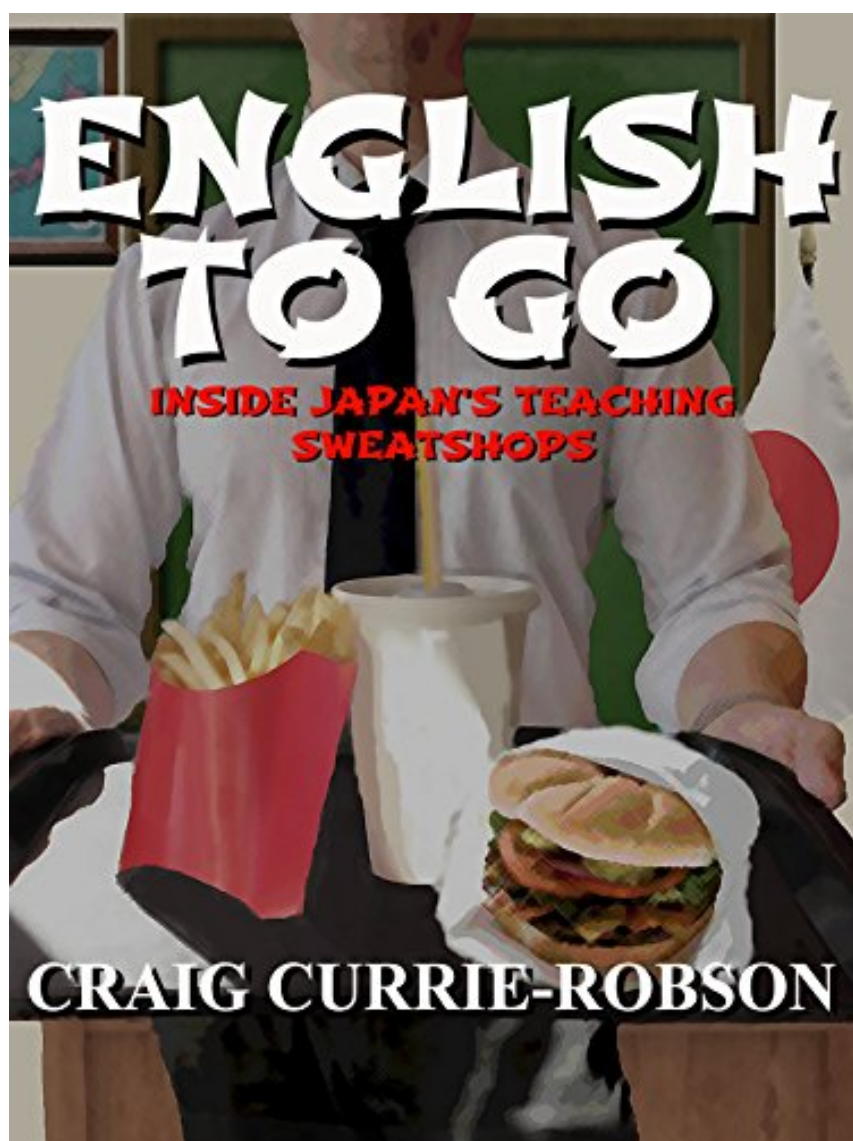


Figure 2: Eikaiwa as “McEnglish” (Currie-Robson, 2015)

In essence then, we have two dominant themes that permeate stereotypes of eikaiwa: 1) the notion of eikaiwa teachers being tokenistic – entertainers or hosts rather than authoritative teachers and 2) a conflict existing between commercial and educational interests – eikaiwa selling a product in response to market forces. I will argue that both of these points when applied to eikaiwa are problematic and by no means limited to the eikaiwa industry. Furthermore I will show how we are able to observe evidence of these issues in many sectors of Japanese ELT and even in the “holy grail” (Nagatomo, 2015) of university education.

My first issue regarding the stigmatization of eikaiwa can be addressed with a

simple question: What do we mean by eikaiwa? When one attempts to answer this question, they may think of the huge chain eikaiwa companies such as NOVA, Aeon, or Gaba. Indeed, these schools are perhaps responsible for a lot of eikaiwa's notoriety in Japan and represent the part of the industry most deeply embedded in the public consciousness. However, eikaiwa is a far more varied sector than that and incorporates small family-owned businesses, the cottage eikaiwa industry (Nagatomo, 2013), online eikaiwa, and amateur eikaiwa classes held in public venues like community centers (Makino, 2016). Each of these categories of eikaiwa have their own differences in terms of hiring practices, teaching methodology, standardization, and target students (Makino, 2016), and one could also expect to encounter a significant degree of diversity between individual schools in each category. If this is, in fact, the case, how can one assume that eikaiwa neatly fits the "McEnglish" mold of the chain eikaiwa companies? From my own personal experiences having worked both in NOVA and in a smaller family-run eikaiwa school, the differences in terms of hiring practices, teacher autonomy, and teachers' qualifications/experience were dramatic. Rather than a slew of "Charisma Men", some teachers in the smaller school actually possessed Master's degrees in TESOL and others were regularly presenting at domestic ELT conferences. Makino (2016) claims that an insufficient understanding of what eikaiwa really is has led to it being seen as "pedagogically unimportant" and that this in turn has led to a gap in what we know about eikaiwa classroom practices. An additional point to be considered is that some eikaiwa schools are now outsourcing teachers and courses to secondary schools and universities (Breaden, 2016). This means that the boundary between eikaiwa and what is seen as "real" teaching is more blurred than ever.

It is the growing indistinctness of the boundaries between eikaiwa and other formal educational contexts that is the basis for my other point of contention with the stigmatization of eikaiwa. I was actually guilty of this myself in the past. When I worked in eikaiwa, I too thought that university teaching was the "holy grail" of English teaching and almost the antithesis of the deprofessionalization I was experiencing at the time. It wasn't until I began to do research into the lives of other university English teachers in Japan that I realized that many of the problems ascribed to eikaiwa don't stop at the university gates. As I mentioned before, two themes tied to the stigmatization of eikaiwa are 1) teacher as entertainer/host and 2) business vs. education. Through my reading on university English teaching I found a number of articles that examined the way in which university teachers feel they are viewed by both their institution and their students (Nagatomo, 2015; Whitsed & Wright, 2011). Nagatomo (2015) found that some university teachers felt they were viewed as replaceable foreign "warm bodies" by their institutions and that the misogynist and sexualized discourse of the "Charisma Man" was still very much alive and well in their workplaces. In a study into the lives of adjunct foreign English language teachers in university, Whitsed and Wright (2011) discovered that many of their participants believed they were still being commodified on the basis of race and physical appearance in order to create an international atmosphere for the university. One participant claimed:

They needed a white face and I was a good one... They need the face for the brochure, for when they do the recruiting session for the parents when they bring their kids. They don't give the face any power but they need [it]. (Whitsed & Wright, 2011, p.38)

This leads into the second theme of business vs. education. Due to the crisis of declining student numbers, Nagatomo (2016) claims that university education has become “a buyer’s market” (p.50) where the exoticism of foreign teachers is used as a tokenistic hook to draw in more students. Also, the increased power that students wield as “customers” has led to an increase in feelings of deprofessionalization in foreign university teachers on fixed-term contracts as they feel it necessary to keep their “customers” happy (Burrows, 2007). As I’m sure you have realized by now, this is all very familiar to the eikaiwa teacher in me.

As I have previously stated, this article is not an attempt to justify every facet of eikaiwa teaching, nor is it designed to delegitimize teaching in formal contexts. I have merely tried to show how eikaiwa is not a mere pejorative stereotype and is actually potentially just as representative of ELT in Japan as any other context. I feel it is important that we examine the intersection of ideology and pedagogy that takes place in different eikaiwa schools and look at what we can learn from other contexts. Even though we may feel we are “above” eikaiwa, it might be that “McEnglish” is closer to us than we would like to imagine.

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My Language Learning History for Reading in a Second Language

 By Akiko Fujii

I have always been a bookworm; I have loved reading since childhood. I have constantly surrounded myself with books, and it has never been difficult for me to read anything in Japanese, which is my native tongue. However, learning how to read fluently in English has been a very different story. Although I have always wished to be able to read comfortably and smoothly in English, and am close to believing I will achieve that dream someday, I have not had a clear plan to reach that goal. I sometimes feel like a butterfly flying around without a map or destination.

In this paper, I will discuss part of the story of my language learning process, focusing on my ideal L2 self for reading as well as my motivation to reach this optimal endpoint. The first question I need to ask is, however, can anyone have a clear plan to become a fluent reader at an advanced level in a second language? Indeed, Larsen-Freeman and Cameron (2008) suggest that although we can write about a learning process, we cannot predict it. With that in mind, this is a story of my learning history on the way to becoming a comfortable reader in English, but not a story to show how other L2 learners can achieve that goal.

Learning English

Like many Japanese, when I entered junior high school I began to study English. Yet, I must admit that I struggled with this subject throughout my secondary schooling. I hated English classes, and simply stopped learning it in college. However, my life took a new turn when I visited New York, and I realized that I would need to know English. As a result, I once again started to learn English in my twenties. I listened to an NHK radio program for a decade and studied English speaking skills at a language school for a few years. At the same time, I studied English reading with a private tutor for a year, and I always practiced reading English on my own. I recollect that I wanted to read a book in English for pleasure and asked some ESL experts at a conference how to improve my reading skills. Some told me to engage in reading repeatedly, which sounded rather boring to me. I never practice reading repeatedly. Others suggested doing speed-reading, in which I should hold a stopwatch while reading a given text. I never did speed-reading. I seldom read graded readers. Instead, I just read as much as possible without stopping. It took me a decade to become a comfortable English reader. These days, I enjoy reading newspapers and love reading paperbacks in English.

A role model closer to home

I read an entire English paperback for the first time in my thirties. I had to force myself to continue to read the book. In fact, it was a painful journey to read that book, which was written by Anne Tyler. I chose that particular book because i) I got a cheap used book; ii) I had read Anne Tyler's works in Japanese before, and; iii) I wanted to be a person who could read a paperback with pleasure. I had access to a book that I was interested in, and I had motivation and time. Still, reading a book in English was very hard for me at the time, and I was not sure whether I could say I read "an English book."

When we were students, we were encouraged to look up words in a dictionary as often as possible. Japanese people often mention that they have read some books in a second language while using a dictionary. These days, even adult Japanese learners understand extensive reading, and they enjoy reading graded readers. However, many Japanese people still seem to believe that reading a book in a second language requires looking words up in a dictionary hundreds or thousands of times. I have found hardly any stories of learners who have become fluent readers in a second language.

Thus, I have not found a role model for reading English fluently. However, as I mentioned before, I am a good reader in my native tongue and I love reading books. Therefore, I know what it means to be a comfortable reader, and I could imagine being a fluent reader in English just as I am a fluent reader in Japanese.

Ideal L2 self

When we look at essays written by Japanese adults, we realize that most of them mention a desire to be able to speak English fluently. Even though the essay writers have studied English in school for six to eight years, few actually speak English. Many Japanese adult learners work hard to become fluent speakers in English. For instance, in her book, Chusonji (2005) mentions that she tried hard to learn English in her thirties and experienced several failures, and it took her ten years to be able to communicate in English accurately and comfortably (pp. 54–64). She has achieved her goal, which she dreamed about for a decade. However, one wonders if she has actually always had a clear achievable goal and worked hard to achieve that goal.

I am not sure that speaking English fluently is "a real goal" for language learners. It does not seem realistic. And dreaming of becoming a fluent English speaker does not sound like having an achievable ideal L2 self. Henry (2016) mentions that "changes in the ideal L2 self are likely to be taking place all the time" (p. 84). Meanwhile, many adult Japanese learners always mention that they wish to speak English fluently and that is their only goal. Only when one can speak English fluently can they say they have succeeded in learning English. Even in this situation, one might still say that they have an ideal L2 self to learn English. In this sense, I have always had an ideal L2 self for reading in English. After I finished completely reading my first paperback, I continued to read paperbacks to become a fluent reader in English. I read Jane Austin and Time magazine, Bridget Jones and Harry Potter. I have not had a clear plan of how to achieve the goal or known what to do to reach

it, although I have asked many people about how to study reading in a second language.

Motivation

Since language learning comes with successes and failures, it is hard to say that high motivations lead to language learning. For instance, Sataporn and Lamb (2004) reported how two learners struggled to take a distance course for learning English, though they were highly motivated at the beginning. Meanwhile, some adult learners have continued to learn a language and achieved their goals. Chusonji (2005) mentions that she studied grammar books for two years and perfectly memorized all of the English phrases in these books (p. 73). Kiyokawa (2006) notes that learning English was her priority in her daily life while she took private English lessons for a decade (pp. 20–23).

I do not know why I was able to continue to read books in English. One private tutor at a language school told me that I should read a Readers' Digest, because my English then was not good enough to read a proper paperback. I changed tutors and continued reading. The new private tutor assigned me a lot of reading materials, and I focused on reading. In fact, at that time, learning English was my main priority. I studied reading English with that teacher for a year and I was greatly encouraged. However, I do not think that their encouragement alone kept me reading English for another decade. I continued reading books and newspapers in English, and one day I found myself reading English without effort. Somehow, reading English has become natural for me.

Conclusion

I have just continued to read as many English paperbacks as possible, never stopping. I have had opportunities to keep practicing and to choose interesting books that I wanted to read. I never had a clear plan to achieve my goal, and it took me a decade to become a comfortable English reader.

I feel as if I am a butterfly in the wind that has accidentally been sent far away. This is my language learning history for reading in a second language.

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Book Review

Gyakuten no Ryuugaku (Studying Abroad to Start Over)

Takano Mikio

IBC Publishing (2018)

ISBN: 978-4-79460-5214



By Antonija Cavcic

This book presents the intriguing stance that studying abroad can be used as an opportunity to “make a comeback” or turn an unfavorable situation around and start over. In fact, the brief introduction to the book on the publisher’s website suggests that study abroad is not merely for outstanding or elite students. It can also be for mid-career level employees, middle-aged individuals or people in unfavorable circumstances looking for solutions (IBC Publishing, 2018). In order to demonstrate such, certified study abroad counselor Takano Mikio primarily draws on case studies and a variety of study abroad alternatives. After initially defining what is meant by *gyakuten no ryuugaku* in the introduction, the book is divided into three chapters with the first addressing all the apprehensions one might have about studying abroad and answering all the frequently asked questions. The second chapter then explores a variety of study abroad options and introduces relevant case studies. The third chapter offers advice and outlines the mental preparation necessary for studying abroad. Then, to end on a profound and personal note, the book closes with additional contributor Nakao Yuri’s inspiring account of her own comeback experience as a struggling student with Asperger syndrome who managed to make a complete turnaround by studying abroad. Given that *Gyakuten no Ryuugaku* has only been published in Japanese and exclusively highlights the struggles of individuals in contemporary Japanese society, it is ideal for readers of all walks of life who are both living in Japan and seeking a little push or motivation to study abroad.

Defining *gyakuten no ryuugaku* and addressing the main issues

As noted, the introduction clarifies the overall meaning of *gyakuten no ryuugaku*. Takano essentially sees studying abroad as a means to turn the tables or get back on track per se. One’s age, background or circumstances are irrelevant. What is interesting, however, is his argument that Japanese society is rather inflexible and not everyone can adapt or fit in, but studying abroad can open doors and help people realize their potential (2018, p. 4). Takano particularly criticizes the conventional styles of lifetime employment in Japan or at least the

obligation to be chained to a company or work under horrible conditions for the sake of stability because it is simply “comfortable” (p. 6). This is reinforced later in Chapter 3 when Takano states that one of the greatest problems of Japanese society is the fear of straying from a stable path, and thus praises the West’s positive attitudes towards failure, tendency to embrace diversity and overall open-mindedness (pp.162–163). While studying abroad can be perceived as an escape from the rigid structures and circumstances in Japan, Takano argues that it is nevertheless a second chance or “game changer” (pp. 5–6). In a culture where changing jobs is not unheard of but not overly encouraged, this perspective may be enlightening and inspiring for individuals who are at their wits’ ends or have simply burned out.

Following on from what seems at times like a counseling session in the introduction, Chapter 1 addresses most of the major concerns or qualms about studying abroad one might still have even after being convinced that it is worthwhile. Topics in this chapter include: English proficiency issues, what one can gain from studying abroad, how even individuals in the most negative of circumstances can benefit from studying abroad, the importance of being flexible about one’s choices and paths, why one’s experiences abroad are essential in a globalized society, the lack/existence of programs to suit everyone’s needs, the role of the study abroad guidance counselor, the price of tuition and the cost-performance of studying abroad. By remaining ever positive in tone and providing solid statistics and persuasive anecdotes and arguments, Takano illustrates the overwhelming number of advantages over the financial burden of studying abroad, which, he adds, can be equivalent to the costs of studying in Japan in some cases (p. 37). To reinforce this, on page 39 he ends the chapter by drawing in findings from research by Yokota (2016) demonstrating that the average salary of Japanese employees is higher for graduates of foreign rather than domestic universities (see Figure 1). In a rather indisputable fashion, Takano proves the long-term benefits of studying abroad are worth the investment.

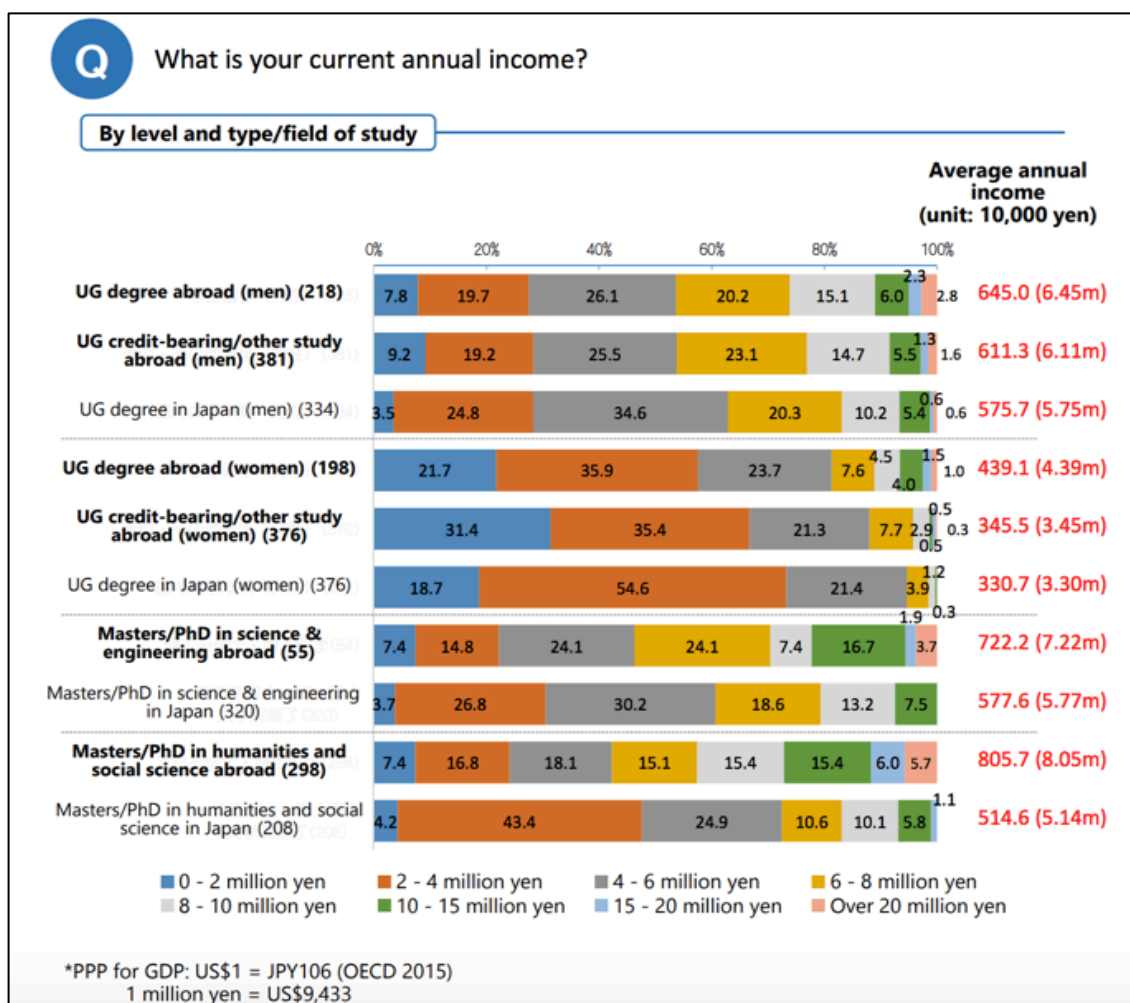


Figure 1: Comparing average salaries of graduates from domestic and foreign universities (Yokota, 2016)

The case for case studies

While providing solid facts and quantitative data lends Takano's arguments credibility, to really reach the book's target reader and effectively make the case for studying abroad, the inclusion of case studies in Chapter 2 is particularly commendable. Giving a voice to or personalizing study abroad experiences is arguably one of the most effective means of influencing readers as it encourages reader empathy and greater reader investment. However, while case studies can be convincing and/or capture the reader's attention, "they are not generalizable; a case—no matter how well done—cannot tell you whether it is the only such instance or whether the problem (or success) is widespread" (Morra & Friedlander, 1999, p. 3). In any case, given that *Gyakuten no Ryuugaku* provides a number of generic yet relatable case studies, it caters to a range of readers with different backgrounds and needs. The case studies include: studying at a language school, studying at a foreign university, studying at a high school abroad, studying at a sports academy, getting a diploma or certificate abroad, going to graduate school abroad, and joining a short-term study abroad program or summer camp. Evidently, a wide range of age groups are covered in these case studies—from junior high school students (summer camp or

short-term study abroad programs) through to middle-aged or mid-career level workers needing a change of scenery or looking for a career change. Every one of the case studies involves an individual who is having trouble or feels out of place in their current school, workplace, or life in Japan. They are generally concerned about their future and seem to be at a loss as to what to do with their lives or current situations. To address these issues, Takano introduces a wide variety of options while ensuring that he also covers any associated concerns one might typically have regarding cost, length, and language proficiency.

One of his strategies in this chapter is to highlight what he sees as the major flaws in Japanese institutions and society and then proceed to demonstrate how things are done differently, if not better, abroad. One of the notable points is his criticism of the reputation of Japanese universities for being difficult to enter but easy to graduate from (p. 64). Adding onto that, Takano highlights the fact that although some Japanese universities are listed high in the World University Rankings, most are so lowly ranked (between 600–800 of a total of 1103 universities) that one is better off studying at the University of Manchester or Sydney. That way, Takano argues, students can essentially kill two birds with one stone by both gaining skills and knowledge necessary for their careers and improving their English (p. 67). In his case for studying at a high school abroad, Takano brings to attention the phenomenon of futoukou (a Japanese word meaning students who refuse or stop going to school). Acknowledging that each student's reasons may vary, he nevertheless notes that even if some of these students decide to go to another school in the hope that things will be different, many fall back into the same rut (p. 86). Part of the problem, he suggests, is Japanese society and its way of thinking. Therefore, studying in a new environment in which the culture, ways of thinking, and relationships with others are completely different is refreshing, eye-opening, and highly recommended (p. 86). Overall, the content and tone of this chapter is critical and encouraging but never condescending. As a result, readers might feel reassured that they are not alone and that there is a range of options available to them. Making that big step to study abroad or hop on the road to recovery just involves getting out of one's comfort zone.

Mental preparation and a personal account

As mentioned earlier, Chapter 3 discusses the mental preparation necessary for studying abroad. Needless to say, learning and living in another environment is not exactly a walk in the park and for anyone uncertain about their future or suffering from anxiety; it is an incredible leap to make. While acknowledging this, Takano dedicates this chapter to offering honest advice to his readers.

First of all, he constantly stresses that without great motivation or effort, nothing will be achieved and nothing will change (p. 152). Interestingly, he also adds that crime or danger should not be considered an issue or hold anyone back since Japan is just as dangerous if the frequency of natural disasters and political tensions with North Korea are

taken into account (p. 153). Furthermore, with Japan's rapidly ageing society, the growing presence of foreign employees working in Japanese companies and Japanese firms expanding their businesses abroad is inevitable. Thus, in this context, being open-minded and being able to communicate with a greater number of people is critical (pp. 154–155). Coming to terms with this situation is, according to Takano, part of the mental preparation process. Another issue that Takano considers is the fear of failure, or the fear of not being able to redeem oneself, that are both so prevalent in Japanese society (p. 163). For Takano, experiencing life in a tolerant society that embraces diversity and sees failure as growth can lead one to their recovery or help one make their comeback.

The final chapter, as noted, is a personal account of a young student, who, in spite of her struggle in Japanese schools, managed to make a complete turnaround by studying abroad. Until she was diagnosed in her late teens, Nakao Yuri struggled for most of her life with Asperger Syndrome and eventually stopped attending school. Her account in this chapter centers on the discovery of her illness, her eventual graduation from high school, and her aspiration thereafter to enroll in the University of York's Psychology in Education course. Rather than the ends, it is the means (or the process) that is emphasized in this chapter. If anything, this chapter follows on from the previous chapter in reinforcing that effort and motivation are essential if one has any hope in making a comeback. While the cases in Chapter 2 were anonymized, the personal touch in Nakao's account is honest, real, and inspiring. Nakao is an atypical study abroad student, and in the face of adversity and in a society that encourages conformity, this chapter demonstrates that sometimes the only way to make a comeback is to both think and venture outside the box.

The verdict

All things considered, perhaps this book does not present any groundbreaking information, but it does offer sound advice and general insight on study abroad options for Japanese people who are struggling or seeking options or solutions to turn their lives around.

If there are any shortcomings, it is perhaps the Anglo-centric angle. While studying English and/or other subjects in English-speaking countries is the primary goal for most Japanese people considering a study abroad program, one cannot discount the importance of learning Asian languages and/or other European languages. In addition, the assumption that people in the West are generally open-minded or flexible is, needless to say, problematic. Another issue is perhaps the fact that Takano seems to insist that the way society works and the unfavorable circumstances for some people in Japan is unlikely to change and that going abroad is the ultimate option or solution. Disregarding the root cause and going elsewhere (rather than perhaps confronting the problem and trying to make positive changes) is neither proactive nor is it a sustainable strategy.

Nevertheless, both easy to read and packed into a neat little manga-length book, *Gyakuten no Ryugaku* is digestible and informative. Rather than regurgitating the information already available in most study abroad handbooks, the balance of case studies, social

criticism, and factual data is insightful and inspiring. While I suggested that it is ideal for readers who are both living in Japan and need a little push or motivation to study abroad, *Gyakuten no Ryuugaku* is a useful resource for not only study abroad counselors, but for counselors in general, too. Rather than focusing on language acquisition and global human resource development, the emphasis on more personal reasons to study abroad is commendable. As for English instructors in Japan who might interact with the target readers of this book, this book not only offers insight into *gyakuten no ryuugaku* as a concept and phenomenon, but it is a valuable tool in making anxious students aware of the various options that are available to them.

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